

Kama River Caper: Scene Three

U.S. foundry experts are latest to join cast in the spine-tingling trade opus—the big USSR truck deal.

By R. A. Wilson and K. A. Kaufman

■ Some day some super-sleuth—aided by, say, the Pink Panther and James Bond (007)—will leak the "Kama River Papers."

They'll be very interesting because, of course, they involve the huge Russian Kama River truck plant which can be a real trade breakthrough for Mack Truck and other U.S. companies.

So far it is unfolding slowly as far as U.S. contenders in the project are concerned. And it unfolds in a confused manner.

In part this appears due to lack of an established pattern for business deals with the USSR on such a large scale. But it's also true because the Soviet won't say how its bets are hedged. That they are hedged seems sure.

A part of the story unfolded last week as the Commerce Dept. released export licences for foundry engineering work and equipment valued at \$162 million.

In terms of the overall project, the Nixon Administration appears committed to approval of export of machine tools for the Kama River plant.

But it's equally clear the Administration is proceeding carefully and cautiously due to both domestic and international political considerations.

It seems the government tactic may be to grant export licenses for various equipment used in the new truck manufacturing com-

plex over a period of time and without fanfare. It doesn't appear ready to announce acceptance of the total project with a single announcement.

The object: Keeping the Kama River project from erupting into a full-scale debate within this country on desirability of U.S. participation in a Russian plant that would have the capability of producing military-oriented products, such as tanks.

President Nixon is already under sharp attack from the conservative wing of the Republican Party for his decision to visit Red

China before May '72 and to support the admission of Communist China to the United Nations.

Despite this opposition, Mr. Nixon apparently has decided to permit U.S. participation in the Kama River project.

The mentioned granting of the two export licenses for shipment of \$162 million in foundry equipment and a third license covering transfer of technology for use of this equipment to the Soviet Union is the tipoff.

Officials insist the action does not constitute approval of the

Even the CIA Is Getting in the Act

Having recently traveled abroad, one foundry equipment builder relates that upon return the CIA indicated this particular foundry builder had a favored position on the upcoming deal.

Just a routine debriefing session with the neighborhood CIA staffer. Just a what...? Is this happening?

Strictly Procedure

Yes, and apparently it's definitely routine. This builder said that "without fail, the CIA contacts me when I get back from abroad, it doesn't matter where."

Friend or foe, it's procedure. Another equipment builder indicates this is the case also. "I doubt that anyone who travels abroad regularly isn't contacted," said this source.

But maybe it's no big deal. "They don't press you. If you don't want to talk, don't talk," was the advice given. "But you might get some decent advice on the other hand."

Know Any Good Bars?

Both executives indicate the CIA is interested in anything you wish to say. Nocturnal activities, good bars, even business if you want to be serious. But they don't pump.

Still, both executives also indicate that somewhere in the background they felt the CIA did have at least some slight influence on what business deal went where.

Each, however, felt additionally that no contract, or export license had been gained or lost because of cooperation or the lack of it.